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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether the personality characteristics associated with sex-role self-concept and field dependency might be related to the coping behavior used with everyday hassles by university women. Female college students (N=40) completed the Rod and Frame test, a questionnaire to define subjects' dominant coping behavior, and the short form of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). The results revealed no significant relationships between coping styles and sex-role self-concepts or field dependency. There was a significant relationship between sex-role self-concept and field dependency if masculine and androgynous subjects were compared to feminine or undifferentiated subjects. This finding suggests that the BSRI responses regarding sex-role self-concept may be more socially influenced than was previously thought. Also, field independent women may use their sense of autonomy to resist social pressure to conform to expected sex-role self-concepts. The field dependent women, in contrast, may use their reliance on external cues in forming sex-role self-concepts considered at present to be more socially desirable. (Author/NB)

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Field Dependency in Relation to Sex-Role Self-Concept: A New Look

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Running Head: Sex-Role Correlates

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Abstract

This study sought to determine if the personality characteristics associated with sex-role self-concept and field dependency might be related to the coping behavior used with everyday hassles by university women. Forty female upper division psychology students were given the Rod and Frame test, a questionnaire which attempted to define their dominant coping behavior, and the short form of Bem's Sex-Role Inventory.

The coping questionnaire used Hall's (1972) paradigm with some modification suggested by Gray (1983). Type I consisted of actions that are proactive such as constructive negotiation where the person deals directly with the problem; type II involves a redifinition of the situation such as developing a new attitude; and type III which suggests an escapist or avoidance technique.

Standardized Rod and Frame scores represent the degress of deviation from true vertical in verticality juggements when the rod is seen in the context of a tilted frame. The two Bem scores, one for femininity and one for masculinity, were converted into t scores; using a median split, sex-role self-concept was determined as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated.

It was hypothesized that androgynous and masculine field dependent subjects would be type I; undifferentiated dependent and independent subjects would be type III, and masculine and feminine field independent women would show type II.

:No significant relationships were found between coping styles and sex-role self-concepts or field dependency. However, contrary to hypothesis, there was a significant relationship between sex-role self-concept and field dependency if masculine and androgynous subjects were compared to feminine and undifferentiated subjects. Masculine and anorogynous women showed more field dependency than did feminine or undifferantated women.

This finding suggests that the BSRI responses regarding sex-role self-concept may be more socially influenced than was previously thought. Also, field independent women may use their sense of autonomy to resist social pressure to conform to expected sex-role self-concepts. The field dependent women, in contrast, may use their reliance on external cues in forming sex-role self-concepts considered at present to be more socially desirable.

Sex-Role Self-Concept and Field Dependency in relation to Coping Techniques

Biologic or genetic variables, personality variables and social factors have become accepted determinants of one's adjustment to stress. Recent research has explored such factors as gender and locus of control (Caldwell, Pearson, & Chin, 1987) and sex-role and social support (Roos & Cohen, 1987): numerous studies exist on various aspects of social support and stress adjustment.

Roos and Cohen (1987) concluded that whether or not a social support exists is less important in stress reduction than if one perceives himself able to utilize the support. They found that a masculine sex-role self-concept was especially helpful for this, a personality trait referred to as instrumentality. However, in situations which demonstrated intangible perceived support (belongingness, acceptance, self-concept), instrumentality was not a significant factor. So in a situation which requires instrumentality to reduce the stress, masculine sex-role orientation would be beneficial. This quasi-experiment was interested in how the perceptual skills of field dependency combined with sex-role self-concept to affect the coping skills of forty (40 university women in situations which could use instrumentality to reduce the unpleasantness of the situation.

Bem's paradigm classifies sex-roles into masculine, feminine, androgynous and undifferentiated. Masculine sex-role women tend to perceive themselves as high in independence, feminine sex-role women perceive themselves as high in nurturance, androgynous as high in both independence and nurturance, and undifferentiated as tending toward lower nurturance than either androgynous or feminine plus lower in the masculine independence.

Field dependency has been found by Witkin (1954) to be a strong influence on personality because it determines how the individual perceives his environment. Field independence will be defined here as a perceptual style which relies more on internal cues while field dependence relies on visual cues in the immediate environment to establish perceptions. Bertini, Pizzamiglio, and Wapner (1986) characterizes the field independent person as more abstract, autonomous, and perferring to maintain an emotional and physical distance to others. The field dependent person typically displays reliance on external cues to determine perceptions, resulting in greater attentiveness to interpersonal cues, a preference for being physically close to others, and a greater emotional openness to communication and expressiveness.

While field dependency is not a factor in verbal tasks, it is a factor, according to Bertini et al. (1986) in any task which requires analyzing and regrouping the parts in a new configuration. These perceptual characteristics then could combine with

personality traits identified by sex typing in a potentially interesting manner to influence how a person reorganizes a stressful event into a less stressful one.

Coping styles were analyzed according to a synthesis of Hall (1972) and Gray's (1980) instruments which had three categories: Type I, consisting of actions that are proactive such as constructive negotiation where the person deals directly with the problem; Type II, redefinition of situation by establishing priorities, eliminating tasks or developing new attitudes; and Type III, consisting of actions that suggest an escapist, avoidance mode such as ignoring or denying the conflict or switching between tasks.

Hypothesis One stated that androgynous subjects, regardless of field dependency, and masculine field dependent subjects would show Type I coping style since both possess instrumentality and sensitivity to others.

Hypothesis Two stated that undifferentiated individuals, regardless of field dependency, would show Type III coping style. They have neither masculine instrumentality nor the feminine expressive or communicative skills which could strengthen the field dependency skills possessed.

Hypothesis Three stated that field independent women, with masculine or feminine sex-roles, would show Type II coping. Since field independency relies on internal cues, she might

be primarily focused on controlling stress by managing it within herself rather than modifying the environment. These are shown in the following figure.

	Field Dependence	Field Independence	
Masculine	I	II	
Feminine		II	Coping Styles
Androgynous	I	I	
Undifferentiated	III	III	

Sex-role self-concept and perceptual style were the independent variables and the style of coping was the dependent variable. Each participant performed the Rod and Frame to test for field dependency; then a 20-item questionnnaire was administered to assess coping style. Lastly, participants did a BEM Sex Role Inventory to determine their sex-role self-concept.

Method

Subjects

Forty female undergraduate psychology students from CSULB served as voluntary participants. The subjects were given extra credit in their psychology class for participating.

Materials and Apparatus

The materials included the Bem Sex Role Inventory, Short Form, designed by Bem (1978), to measure sex-role self-concept. This consisted of a list of thirty (30) adjectives, (10 items feminine, 10 masculine and 10 fillers) which the subject decided how appropriately each item described her using a scale from 1 (never or almost never true) to 7 (always to almost always true). The BSRI was used because it seemed to be the best measure of sex-role self-concepts.

The hassles questionnaire used Hall's (1972) paradigm of coping style or strategies: Type I was negotiation or control. Type II was personal redefinition of expectations, and Type III was reactive behavior or escape. This questionnaire contained 20 common, daily hassles from Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, (1980) Hassles and Uplifts Scales; each hassle was given three selections which represented the three styles of coping.

The Rod and Frame apparatus.(Witkin et al.,1954, 1964), measured field dependency or independency. It consists of a box and rod inside which are both capable of being rotated; the subjects attempt to determine if the rod is vertical regardless of the position of the box.

Design

This was a 2 X 4 factorial design defined by field

dependency (field dependent X field independent) and sex-role types (androgynous X masculine X feminine X undifferentiated) as quasi-independent variables. The dependent variable was the coping style.

Procedure

Each subject was introduced to the researcher with the comment, "You will probably enjoy this study. Most people seem to." An introduction was read to each subject by the researcher which explained the three tests which were to be administered and how the results would be made available to the student (see Appendix A) The three tasks were given in a specified sequence: first the Rod and Frame was administered according to standard procedure (see Appendix B), second the revised Hassles questionnaire was completed (see Appendix C), and third the Bem Sex-Role Inventory was completed (see Appendix D).

The subjects were then thanked for participating.

Results

The sex-role self-concept and Rod and Frame results presented here are based on 36 subjects. The coping style analysis used 34 of the subjects.

To determine sex-role self-concept, all subjects' femininity and masculinity scores on the BSRI were ranked and each distribution was divided by median split. Then the scores

were converted to T-scores and compared to Bem's T- scores for Short Form. As can be seen, the Masculine scores are essentially identical. The Feminie scores are higher in the present sample.

Table 1

Comparison of T-scores to Bem's Standardized Scores for Women

	Femininity	Masculinity
Long Beach sample		
Median	6.00	4.80
Mean	5.73	4.73
Bem T-score	54	48
Stanford University Normative		
Median	5.70	4.80
Mean	5.57	4.78
T-score	53	50

Each subject was then categorized: high masculine and high feminine score was categorized as Androgynous sex-role: high masculine and low feminine was Masculine sex-role: low masculine and high feminine was Feminine sex-role; and low masculine and low feminine was Undifferentiated.

The Rod and Frame scores were ranked and divided by median split (median = 17): higher scores were field dependent and lower scores were field independent.

Coping type was determined by the category selection which received the largest number of points; if a subject selected two types an equal number of times, that subject was

not included. Results showed that Type I was the definite preference of subjects, regadless of sex-role self-concept, having been chosen by 79% of all subjects. There were no significant relationships involving coping styles in chi-square tests. Coping styles and sex-role self-concepts yielded χ^2 = 9.2 (6, N = 34); coping styles and field dependency yielded χ^2 =3.92 (2, N =34).

The Rod-and-Frame scores were grouped according to sex-role self-concept. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations. A one-way ANOVA on the Rod-and-Frame scores for the four sex-role categories yielded no significant effect, F (3,35)=2.1, $p>.05$. The scores for Masculine and Androgynous subjects were then combined and compared against those for Feminine and Undifferentiated subjects on the basis that they differed in being either high or low in Masculinity. The means and standard deviations can be seen in Table 2. A one-way ANOVA showed that the Masculine and Androgynous subjects were significantly more field dependent than the Feminine and Undifferentiated subjects: F (1,34)=4.66, $p<.05$.

Comparison of Mean Deviation per Sex-Role Self-Concept

	Group Mean
Masculine	27.67
Feminine	20.70
Androgynous	32.57
Undifferentiated	10.71

Discussion

The results did not support any of the hypotheses. All three hypotheses used either field dependency or sex-role self-concept as the independent variable and the type of coping as the dependent variable. The results from the coping questionnaire showed a strong preference for Type I behavior for all participants regardless of sex-role self-concepts or field dependence or independence.

A preference this biased suggests two problems: that the questionnaire used was not valid and perhaps also that the construct of using Halls's coping paradigm with Kanner et al.'s (1981) hassles was not appropriately analyzed.

The coping questionnaire was taken principally from Hall (1972) with some clarification from Gray (1983). Both had used it to measure role conflicts among professional married women. Hall and Gray analyzed these conflicts into three types: Type I which required the woman to alter role expectations of her by other people, Type II required that the woman change her attitude or perceptions toward her own role expectations (as opposed to changing others' expectations), and Type III required that the woman try to change her behavior to meet all existing expectations.

These types involve a role conflict in which a woman feels some conflict of obligations drawing her in equally desirable ways, and for which she must make a choice among the options. The options Hall and Gray used were empirically factored.

Kanner's Hassle and Uplift Scale, however does not use unavoidable role conflict; he uses daily irritants to assess their influence on psychological symptoms and their relationship to life events. The assumption was made that daily irritants, i.e. hassles, also present conflicts which necessitate choices. Actually, many of the irritants used in our questionnaire gave options which, even on face value, did not appear attractive in a comparison.

The argument can be made that the manner is which one avoids the irritant is the significant detail. To do so requires that the options not be a matter of common sense but a dilemma of equally attractive options which personality factors could influence. By combining the two many of the resulting questions seemed to confuse avoidance of an unnecessary hassle with refusal to address a conflict. So the attempt to assess how the instrumentality of masculine sex-role self-concept correlated with coping behavior was contaiminated by other variables.

Latack's (1986) paradigm for coping with job stress seems closer to our investigation of hassles for Latack

defined coping as an "effort to master conditions that tax or exceed adaptive resources". . . a response to situations characterized by uncertainty and important consequences." While hassles involve relatively little uncertainty, it does not negate the possibility that personality resources could influence a choice if self-esteem were involved. A next step might be to devise a testing instrument which uses instrumentality (getting someone else to contribute to solving the problem) and cognitive reappraisal (solving the problem abstractly) as options for coping with a third alternative such as Latack's option of symptom management, i.e. a focus on controlling the psychophysiological states resulting from the hassle. While self-esteem is often associated with masculine sex-role self-concept, this might be too narrow a conclusion, as is discussed later in this section.

The most interesting result was the relationship between field dependency and sex-role self-concept. It was anticipated that more masculine and androgynous sex-role women would be field independent and feminine and undifferentiated sex-role women would be field dependent. This followed the reasoning that high masculine scores would correlate with low field dependency scores by virture of their higher

independence and use of internal cues. That the masculine/androgynous scores were significantly higher in field dependency than the feminine-undifferentiated scores supports Bertini's conclusion that field independence influences only how the individual perceives the environment but not how she decides to respond to that environment, i.e. that field dependency is more a variable in orienting than it is in attaining, or selecting, a goal.

So masculine instrumentality is not a function of field independence, but that does not answer the question as to why they were field dependent. Women high in masculine scores are thus associated with greater attentiveness to interpersonal cues, a preference for being physically close to others, and a greater emotional openness to communication and expressiveness. The common link perhaps might be self-esteem in social relationships. High self-esteem has been linked with masculinity, but perhaps the term must address the social context. Are these the confident individuals who expect a positive response from others? Are these also the individuals who have developed a socially desirable sex-role, which could be a result of their social perceptiveness? If field dependent people tend to deal better with others and rely on others to help them define ambiguous situations or provide standards (Bertini), this probably contributes to

the masculine instrumentality conclusion by Roos, i.e. that masculine sex-role self-concept individuals made better use of support systems to provide tangible aid.

Roos also found that the stress-buffering effect of instrumentality was not present in low psychologically masculine subjects. That also corresponds with our findings of low field dependence in undifferentiated or feminine sex-role self-concept subjects. Since low field dependency scores associates them with interpersonal distance and low interest in others, it may be that their use of bolder social actions or concern are inhibited because they have not developed the gregarious behavior others find attractive, especially in today's culture. Without positive social feedback, there is less chance that they would act decisively socially. Since the Bem test asks the subject to compare herself with others in an implied interpersonal behavior, i.e. how aggressive or loving, adventuresome, one is, an inhibited person is at a disadvantage. The research which links masculine/androgynous sex-role self-concept with self-esteem may be biased toward successful social interaction rather than feelings of autonomy, competency and worth.

Roos also found that instrumentality had no effect in situations which called for intangible forms of perceived

support such as self-concept and belonging. Feminine and undifferentiated individuals, field independent, may have self-esteem but display it in more autonomous ways. If their impersonal, abstract orientation contributes to their development of sex-role, it may influence their perception of self worth also, and not negatively.

Another interesting aspect comes from Bertini's findings that field dependent individuals use repression and denial more successfully than do field independent people, so they might forget stressful material or certain aspects of it. Roos found that high psychologically masculine individuals felt less psychological distress from stress than did psychologically feminine individuals. Perhaps the stress buffering effect of masculine sex-role self-concept comes as much from the psychological defense system as it does from instrumentality.

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Appendix A

After seating the participant, the following was read to her: "Hello, my name is _____. I am conducting research on women. You have been asked here today to be a participant in this study to discover how different women judge and react to their environment in various situations.

"I will be first asking you to look into a large box and tell me whether the line inside is straight up and down. Next I will give you a list of personal statements that I would like you to respond to as truthfully as possible. This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. Your name and identity will not be used.

"During the last week of classes the results of this study will be available to you. A summary of the results will be handed out in your class. (Pause) Do you have any questions? (Pause). We will start with the line in the box."

Appendix B

Instructions and procedure followed when administering the Rod and Frame.

"In this part of the study we want to find out how well you can determine the upright or vertical position of the line in various conditions. In this box you will see a square frame and within this frame you will see a line. It is possible for me to tilt the box or the line to the left or the right. I can tilt the box alone or the line alone.

"Please turn your chair and place your chin on this rest.

"When I open the curtain at the beginning of each trial, I want you to tell me whether the line is straight up and down or whether it is tilted, and if so, in which direction it is tilted. In other words, tell me whether the line is straight with the walls of this room or whether it is tilted. Are there any questions?"

Adjust the head rest. The participant's hands must be on her lap, not touching the table. Tell the participant to keep her head on the rest at all times. Adjust the frame to 28L and the rod to 28L.

"I'm going to lower the curtain now. Please tell me the position of the line." If she responds tilted, say: "I will turn the line slowly until you think it is straight with the walls of this room. As I said, I will turn it slowly, and after

each turn, tell me whether it has been turned enough or whether you want it turned some more. Just say 'more' or 'enough' after each turn. Please make your decisions quickly and don't be too finicky. Which way shall I move the line to make it vertical - clockwise or counter-clockwise?" Now move the rod 3 degrees at a time to the opposite direction in which the participant says it is tilted, until she reports "enough". Ask the participant after she reports the line vertical: "Is the line now vertical - that is, is it straight with the walls of this room?"

If she says the line is vertical at the outset of the first trial, ask her this question: "In other words, is the line straight with the walls of the room we are in?" If she now says the line is tilted, give the instructions above. If she repeats that the line is vertical, close the curtain and proceed to Trial 2.

"I'm going to raise the curtain now."

Read before Trial 2: "If you think the line is tilted, I will turn the line slowly until you think it is straight with the walls of this room. As I said, I will turn it slowly, and after each turn, tell me whether it has been turned enough or whether you want it turned some more. Just say 'more' and 'enough' after each turn. Please make your decision quickly and don't be too finicky. When you tell me it is tilted tell

me which way to move it, clockwise or counter-clockwise."

Adjust the frame to 28L and the rod to 28R and say "I'm going to lower the curtain now.

"Would you tell me now and at the beginning of subsequent trials whether the line is straight with the walls of this room, or tilted; and if the line is tilted, whether the line should be moved clockwise or counter-clockwise to be made straight."

If the participant asks you to turn the line, do so until she says "enough". Ask her again, "Is the line now vertical - that is, is it straight with the wallls of this room?"

Do not ask this question on subsequent trials. Close curtain. Record adjustment. Proceed to next trial.

Trial 3 - Frame 28R Rod 28R

Trial 4 - Frame 28R Rod 28L

Trial 5 - Frame 28L Rod 28L

Trial 6 - Frame 28L Rod 28R

Trial 7 - Frame 28R Rod 28R

Trial 8 - Frame 28R Rod 28L

"This part of the study is over now. Would you please come with me."

Take her into next room and hand her the coping style and Bem questionnaires. "Please fill these papers out. Please start on page one and complete each item until the last page. when you are finished, please fold it in half and place it in this

cardboard box. You are free to go when you are finished. If you have any questions I will be in the hall. Thank you for participating."

Leave the room and sit at a desk in the hall reading a book. Smile and say thank you to each person as she leaves.

Appendix C

HASSLES

Directions : Hassles are irritants that can range from minor annoyances to fairly major pressures, problems, or difficulties. They can occur few or many times. Listed below are a number of ways in which a person can feel hassled. Please circle the letter of the statement that best describes how you would deal with the hassles. Please answer each one.

1. If my next door neighbors are noisy,

   a. I would talk the situation over with my neighbor.
   b. I would remind myself that the noise stops after awhile.
   c. I would leave my house when my neighbor is noisy.

2. My electric bill is very high:

   a. I would justify why my usage is high.
   b. I am not usually concerned about this.
   c. I would veryify the charges with the Electric Company.

3. If I didn't like my current work duties,

   a. I would accept this situation because there is nothing I can do about it.
   b. I would get together with my boss to talk it over.
   c. I would try to change my attitude.

4. When I encounter inconsiderate smokers,

   a. I would not let it bother me.
   b. I would ask the smoker to stop.
   c. I would keep away from this situation.

5. Sometimes when I have troubling thoughts about my future,

   a. I seek advice from someone who can help me.
   b. I put the issue out of my mind.
   c. I seek the company of my friends.

6. If I hear gossip,

   a. I would separate myself as much as possible from the people who created this situation.
   b. I would tell myself I have no time for gossip.
   c. I would ask the people not to gossip.

7. When the weather has been really hard to predict,

   a. I watch for the weather on TV.
   b. I expect the worst, so I can be prepared.
   c. I don't think about the weather.

8. The traffic has been really heavy:

   a. I would use some way to relax in the car.
   b. I wouldn't drive during rush hour.
   c. I would go another way with less traffic.

9. When I think about pollution,

   a. I feel that this is best left to experts.
   b. I try to find out more about the problem.
   c. I tell myself that the pollution problem probably isn't as bad as the papers say.

10. When I feel I don't have enough time for recreation,

   a. I would tell myself that what I am doing is more important.
   b. I would make more time for recreation.
   c. I would accept the situation because there is nothing I can do to change it.

11. When I find myself having to prepare meals,

   a. I plan meals that fit my schedule.
   b. I steer clear of preparing meals.
   c. I try to see this as a chance to develop new cooking skills.

12. If I find muself being taken advantage of,

   a. I accept the situation because there is nothing I can do to change it.
   b. I tell myself that the situation isn't that bad.
   c. I talk it over with the people who are responsible.

13. If I had concerns about meeting high standards at school,

   a. I would get rid of some other activity to make more time for school work.
   b. I would not worry about high standards.
   c. I would hire a tutor so that I could be sure that I would get good grades.

14. When I have to fill out forms,

    a. I give it my best effort to be complete.
    b. I try to look at this as something I don't mind.
    c. I put it off until they're not needed anymore.

15. If I find it difficult to express myself,

    a. I keep away from this kind of situation.
    b. I deal with the difficulty when it comes up.
    c. I act as though I feel very confident.

16. When I have problems with my lover,

    a. I change the way in which I act with my lover.
    b. I talk it over with my lover.
    c. I tell myself that things will work out with time.

17. If I have too much to do,

    a. I do things in order starting with the most important.
    b. I hope that things will get better with time.
    c. I don't allow myself to be bothered by the pressure.

18. When thinking about crime,

    a. I try to avoid dangerous situations.
    b. I remind myself that crime isn't that bad in my neighborhood.
    c. I consider joining a "neighborhood watch" program.

APPENDIX D

DIRECTIONS

Given below are words that describe people. We would like you to use those characteristics to describe yourself. That is, we would like you to indicate, on a scale from 1 to 7, how true of you each of these characteristics is.

Example: sly

Write a 1 = if it is never or almost never true that you are sly.
Write a 2 = if it is usually not true that you are sly.
Write a 3 = if it is sometimes but infrequently true that you are sly.
Write a 4 = if it is occasionally true that you are sly.
Write a 5 = if it is often true that you are sly.
Write a 6 = if it is usually true that you are sly.
Write a 7 = if it is always or almost always true that you are sly.

Thus, if you feel it is sometimes but infrequently true that you are "sly," never or almost never true that you are "malicious," always or almost always true that you are "irresponsible," and often true that you are "carefree," then you would rate these characteristics as follows:

Sly	3
Malicious	1

Irresponsible	7
Carefree	5

Please answer every one.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Never or almost never true	Usually not true	Sometimes but infrequently true	Occasionally true	Often true	Usually true	Always or almost always true

Defend my own beliefs	1
Affectionate	
Conscientious	
Independent	
Sympathetic	
Moody	
Assertive	
Sensitive to needs of others	
Reliable	
Strong personality	

Understanding	
Jealous	
Forceful	
Compassionate	
Truthful	
Have leadership abilities	
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	
Secretive	
Willing to take risks	
Warm	

Adaptable	
Dominant	
Tender	
Conceited	
Willing to take a stand	
Love children	
Tactful	
Aggressive	
Gentle	
Conventional	